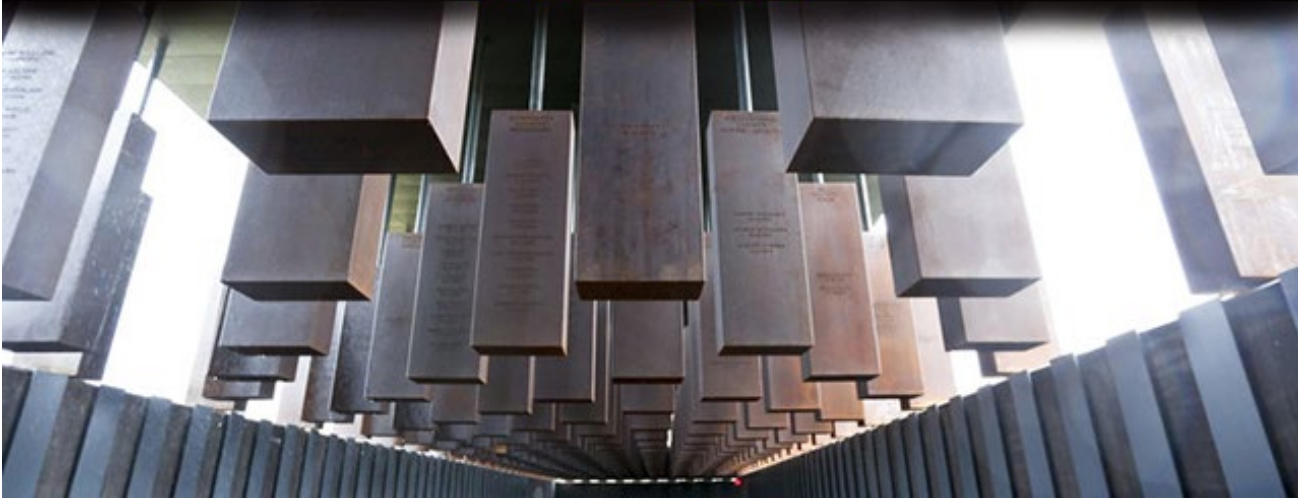


# ALEXANDRIA COMMUNITY REMEMBRANCE PROJECT NEWSLETTER



## January 2022 Edition

### What If The Dirt Could Talk?

This year will be a significant one for residents of the City of Alexandria. The Alexandria Community Remembrance Project will further recognize the lives of Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas through a tangible, ritualized, collection of terra. This is a necessary step in our City's journey as we reckon with past injustices.

Derryn Moten, a Professor at Alabama State University, described why it's important to sink trowels into the ground [in an EJI video](#).

"These are cold cases and there is no finality, no closure, if we don't acknowledge these crimes... if we don't force counties and states and cities to concede that these crimes did occur."

Alexandria's application to move forward with a soil collection that represents the lives, trauma and terror McCoy and Thomas experienced at the hands of the white community in this city has been accepted by the Equal Justice Initiative.

The experience of piercing the earth at specific sites has proven to be emotionally impactful for participants.

"It's a confrontation, because you are confronted with truth in a visual way that is undeniable," said US Magistrate and Judge Vanzetta Penn McPherson, after collecting soil for John Temple, a man lynched in Montgomery, Ala. during the Red Summer of 1919.

"For all I know, some of the very dirt we dug was there. What if this dirt could talk? I thought that digging on that soil was a poignant way to connect with the time, the event and most importantly, the man," McPherson added.

The ceremonies will happen in Alexandria in April and August on the anniversary dates of each man's lynching.

ACRP has hired two African American genealogists to help locate any living family members. The first reports from their research are expected in February 2022.

In October, Alexandria residents plan to make a pilgrimage to Montgomery, Alabama to deliver the soil

collected. These tangible memories of McCoy and Thomas will join others on display at the Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration, at the Peace & Justice Memorial Center, and at EJI's headquarters in Alabama.

"In this soil, there is the sweat of the enslaved. In the soil there is the blood of victims of racial violence and lynching. There are tears in the soil from all those who labored under the indignation and humiliation of segregation. But in the soil there is also the opportunity for new life, a chance to grow something hopeful and healing for the future," said EJI Executive Director Bryan Stevenson.

Earth representing McCoy and Thomas will also be displayed in several prominent places throughout Alexandria - a reminder of our commitment to confronting the truth of our past and ensuring equity and inclusion for all.

## In The News

### [Alexandria plans public pilgrimage to Montgomery, Ala., to honor lynching victims](#)

Be sure to read *Washington Post* reporter Sarah Enelow-Snyder's article about ACRP's upcoming public pilgrimage planned for October 2022. The article describes the work ACRP has engaged in and the plans for the next year with interviews from Councilman John Chapman and ACRP Steering Committee Member McArthur Myers.

### Virginia NAACP Considering Suing Final Redistricting Maps

The state's NAACP is considering an appeal to the US Supreme Court of the new political landscape approved by Virginia's Supreme Court. The NAACP drew its own redistricting maps for consideration during a process that was thrown to the Supreme Court when a panel of politicians and citizens could not agree. The Court appointed two masters to develop the maps: Democrat Dr. Bernard Grofman and Republican Sean Trende. Their maps, which have received some praise for being fair in both [The Washington Post](#) and the [Roanoke Times](#), were approved by the Court on December 28, 2021. The NAACP's legal team wants to make sure the interests of Black voters are secure. The organization is waiting for their legal team to weigh in, however, after analyzing the initial draft district maps released on December 7, 2021, the NAACP asked the courts to take the legacy of slavery and continued racial discrimination into consideration. The NAACP's main concern was that the maps were redrawn using data from the American Community Survey instead of the 2020 Census results. Some of the organization's recommendations would affect South Alexandria. Read the [NAACP's comments](#) to the Virginia Supreme Court prior to their approval of the maps.

### Newsblast from the Past:

The *Alexandria Gazette* on Voting Rights, 1901:

When Virginia was considering an "educational" or literacy requirement to vote, an editorial appeared in the *Alexandria Gazette* (a paper edited and published by conservative democrats) that supported the disenfranchisement of African Americans.

"It appears that the total number of white males of voting age is 301,379. Of these, a little more than twelve per cent, or 36,493, are classed as illiterates. The colored voters number 146,122, of whom fifty-two percent, or 76,764, are illiterate. A general disqualification on the ground of illiteracy would thus make white supremacy absolutely assured. Such a provision would leave the white vote 264,886, and the colored vote 69,358. One of the principle reasons given for the constitutional convention was to curtail the right of suffrage among the ignorant and vicious and a fair and reasonable educational qualification would seem to be the easiest solution of the difficulty."

*Alexandria Gazette*, July 29, 1901, p.2

### ACRP Funding

Funding from the American Rescue Fund Act has been designated to the ACRP through December 2024 to support the City's Equal Justice Initiative. Under the category of racial equity and justice, \$150,000 has been made available to hire a part-time staff member; support speakers, special programs, and remembrance events; and create a publication on the two known lynchings.

## Upcoming Events

### January 14, 2022 - Annual City Martin Luther King Jr. Remembrance (virtual).

The 49th Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Program will honor the life and legacy of Dr. King in reference to the King Center's 2022 theme: It Starts With Me: Shifting Priorities to Build the Beloved Community. The virtual program will take place on January 14 at 7 p.m. and can be viewed through a link at <https://www.alexandriava.gov/historic/blackhistory/> or on the Comcast cable channels 70 & 1084.

Read more about the [virtual event](#).

**January 17, 2022 - Exhibition of ACPS Artwork on MLK Jr.** will be on display in the Vola Lawson Lobby of Alexandria City Hall in February.

### February 12, 2022 - 11:00 a.m. Virtual/ Free Lecture: A White Historian Explores "Race Riots"

Violent clashes between large crowds of different races have disturbed the social order in the United States since long before the Civil War, and the phrase "race riot" has been used to describe such disparate events as the Tulsa massacre of 1921, the 1968 uprisings following the assassination of Martin Luther King, and the anti-Chinese riots of the 1870s. Susan Strasser investigates the term, and a history of racially charged violence that has framed American discussions of race throughout the nation's history.

Register in advance for this [webinar](#).

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## Upcoming Committee Meetings

### January 27 The Community Remembrance Project Soil and Marker Committee 7-8 p.m.

Virtual Meeting via Zoom. Register [here](#).

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## Committee Reports

**The Soil and Marker Committee** met virtually and finalized recommendations for the soil collection for Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas. These recommendations will guide the April and August Remembrance Events plans.

**The Pilgrimage Committee** took the month of December off. They will resume meeting in January to further prepare for a pilgrimage to Alabama in October 2022.

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[Joseph McCoy](#) [Benjamin Thomas](#).

[For more information](#)

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[HistoricAlexandria@alexandriava.gov](mailto:HistoricAlexandria@alexandriava.gov)

*The Alexandria Community Remembrance Project (ACRP) is a city-wide initiative dedicated to helping Alexandria understand its history of racial terror hate crimes and to work toward creating a welcoming community bound by equity and inclusion.*

**Office of Historic Alexandria  
City of Alexandria, Virginia**



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